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TAGS: PREL KTIP PGOV YM IR MU

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES TIP, IRAN, AND YEMEN WITH TOP OMANI POLICE OFFICIAL

REF: STATE 104654; MUSCAT 1035; MUSCAT 441

CLASSIFIED BY: Richard Schmierer, Ambassador, Department of State, Embassy Muscat; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On December 22, Ambassador Schmierer met with the Inspector General of the Royal Oman Police (ROP), who also serves as head of the National Committee for Combating Human Trafficking, Lieutenant General Malik Al Ma'amari. The Deputy IG Muhammad bin Abdullah Al Riyami and Public Relations Officer Abdullah Ali Al Harthy were also present. The meeting was primarily an introductory call, although the Ambassador inquired into several matters of substance, including trafficking in persons (TIP), Yemen, and Iran. Al Ma'amari recognized the need to address TIP and the Al Qaeda (AQ) threat in Yemen. (NOTE: The ROP has responsibility for customs and the Omani Coast Guard. END NOTE.) END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS: Pursuant to ref A the Ambassador presented Al Ma'amari with the TIP Action Plan for Oman and inquired into current Omani efforts to combat TIP, including the issues of passport retention, a shelter/care center for TIP victims, and the ROP TIP website. Al Ma'amari said that the TIP concept is still relatively new to Oman but that the government is working on addressing TIP related issues. In this context, he noted that judges need training on TIP as it is a foreign concept to traditional Omani jurisprudence. As to the issue of passport retention, which is still commonly practiced by Omani employers, Al Ma'amari recognized that this is a problem and suggested, as a solution, that the employees be allowed to retain their passports but be required to have a clearance document from their employer stating that the employee has permission to leave the country before they may board a plane at the airport. He emphasized the employers' concern that if they do not keep employees' passports, an employee would be free to steal/commit a crime and abscond, a common Omani fear.

¶3. (C) TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS CONTINUED: The Ambassador then inquired about a shelter/care center for victims of TIP. Al Ma'amari stated that it remains incomplete as they are still constructing premises for families; he invited Embassy personnel to tour it when it is complete. The ROP is continuing to use a villa in Muscat to house TIP victims. (NOTE: This conflicts with ref B reporting on Omani plans for a shelter. This likely reflects the internal struggle the Omanis are having to develop the best shelter solution for their very limited number of trafficking victims. END NOTE.) The final TIP topic addressed was the relatively new ROP TIP website. Al Harthy said that there were numerous reports/complaints made using the ROP TIP reporting website, but that most of the reports are about labor disputes and not TIP related. Al Harthy noted that over a one hour period there is an average of 50 logons (NOTE: It was not clear if this is during peak hours. END NOTE). Al Ma'amari and Al Harthy said that most of these cases are resolved through mediation, which the ROP is tracking. Al Harthy also said that in April or May 2010 a report with TIP statistics, including number of TIP cases charged, prosecuted, convicted and sentenced,

will be published by the ROP.

4.(C) YEMEN: When the Ambassador asked about the ROP's concerns regarding the present situation in Yemen, Al Ma'amari's response was "you know more than us." Expressing a personal view, he said that he doesn't know which Yemen is better: one that is fragmented, or unified. In particular, he mentioned the worsening condition in the South, for which he blames the Yemeni government, as it provides no services/aid. He said that it would be good to put pressure on the Yemeni President to give aid to the South. He also noted that two AQ operatives and 30 civilians were killed in a targeted attack earlier in the week and that it is hard to distinguish between "honest people" and AQ operatives. Al Ma'amari also complained that the ROP oftentimes has to feed and clothe Somalis, Djiboutis, Ethiopians, and Sudanese who pass through Oman from Yemen on their way to regional economic hubs.

¶5. (C) IRAN: The Ambassador probed into the recent Iran-Oman security agreement (ref C) regarding smuggling, but Al Ma'amari either did not pick up on the exact nature of the question, or was unwilling to discuss specifics, as he talked about tangential issues. He said that it is difficult for Oman and Iran to keep track of the Afghanis and Pakistanis crossing into Oman via Iran, as the smuggling (human, drugs, and arms) is controlled by gangs. He noted the difficulty for the ROP in distinguishing between

fishermen and smugglers, as they use the same type of boat (thus requiring that each boat be physically searched by the ROP), but that the ROP is using Omani fishermen as informants as part of its interdiction efforts. Al Ma'amari was also hopeful that the Omani Coast Guard "will be strengthened."

¶6. (C) COMMENT: Al Ma'amari was cooperative, but in several instances relied on Al Harthy for answers to the Ambassador's questions. Al Ma'amari's suggestion of a clearance document as a solution to the current practice of passport retention is indicative of his recognition that passport retention is a key TIP issue. Post will continue to follow-up with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Manpower on this issue. END COMMENT.
Schmierer